



## Pick Your Path to Health

### **Alcoholism and Asian Women**

Do you experience a flushing sensation when you drink alcohol?

If you do, various researchers believe you may be experiencing the effect of a built-in protective factor against excessive alcohol use. But even this so-called protective factor is not a foolproof way to keep alcohol consumption in check.

The physical response that many Asians experience when they drink alcohol includes flushing of the skin (especially in the face and torso) and an increase in skin temperature. This has become a popular explanation for the low alcohol consumption by Asians. However, a lack of research about drinking patterns among Asians makes it difficult to determine the severity of alcohol consumption.

Asian women are much more likely to abstain from or consume lesser amounts of alcohol than Asian men and the general population, but there are substantial differences in drinking behaviors among the various ethnic subgroups. A study of four Asian ethnic groups in Los Angeles found that there were more drinkers than abstainers among Japanese-Americans and Cambodian-Americans, and more abstainers than drinkers among Korean-Americans and Filipino-Americans (see chart).

### **What Is Alcohol Abuse?**

According to Dr. Ford Kuramoto, executive director of the National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse, Inc. in Los Angeles, California, "Asian and Pacific Islanders often have different standards of alcohol abuse. Their views often differ from traditional western views of alcohol abuse in that they may not consider heavy drinking in their home as alcohol abuse."

When you drink alcohol, do it wisely. You may enjoy moderate use of alcohol, which is defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as no more than one drink per day for a woman and no more than two drinks per day for a man. This includes one 12-oz. bottle of beer or wine cooler, one 5-oz. glass of wine, or 1.5 oz. of hard liquor.

When alcohol is consumed in large quantities, it can be harmful whether you drink it at home or outside of the home. Consuming alcohol without

control affects your health, even if you consider it to have healing properties.

According to the National Institute for Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, you are abusing alcohol, if you have experienced any of the following behaviors in the past 12 months:

- Failure to fulfill major work, school, or home responsibilities;
- Drinking in situations that are physically dangerous, such as while driving or operating machinery;
- Having recurring alcohol related legal problems, such as being arrested or driving under the influence of alcohol;
- Continued drinking despite having ongoing relationship problems that are caused or worsened by the drinking

Always be aware of how much you drink. If you think you're drinking too much, you probably are, so be prepared to cut back.

## **The Disease**

Alcoholism is a disease. Alcoholics have an insatiable craving for alcohol that becomes the number one priority in their lives. Alcohol becomes more important than food, water, and even family obligations.

Alcoholism includes the following symptoms:

- Craving: A strong need, or compulsion, to drink;
- Loss of control: the inability to limit one's drinking on any given occasion;
- Physical dependence: withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety, occur when alcohol use is stopped after a period of heavy drinking;
- Tolerance: the need to drink greater amounts of alcohol in order to "get high."

In the past, alcoholism was not accepted as a disease and people often wondered why their loved ones did not just "use a little will power" and stop drinking. Unfortunately, it is not that easy.

Dr. Kuramoto explains that "due to religious and cultural reasons, Asian and Pacific Islanders feel a stigma more intensely than other cultures." Asian and Pacific Islander families tend to be very private and do not want attention drawn to them, especially in regard to an issue they consider

shameful. So they rarely seek alcohol treatment because they do not want to face the perceived disgrace traditionally associated with admitting these problems outside the home.

"Even if the drinker does not consider her habits to be abusive, adverse health problems may result," explains Dr. Kuramoto. Heavy drinking increases the risk for liver cirrhosis, immune system problems, brain damage, harm during pregnancy and certain cancers including those of the liver and throat, among others.

Some alcohol treatment programs have proven to be successful so consider seeking help if you or a loved one drinks too much.

## **Recovery**

If you have a problem with alcohol, visit your healthcare provider and be prepared to answer some questions about your drinking habits. Once your level of addiction is established, you and your doctor will determine a road to recovery that will best suit you.

Treatment varies depending on the severity of the addiction and the resources available in your community. Treatment may include detoxification, the process of safely getting alcohol out of your system; prescribed medications that help to prevent a relapse; and individual and/or group counseling.

Many experts consider developing mechanisms that teach you how to react in a risky situation to be the most important step in your recovery. Following detoxification, most people enroll in hospital-based or freestanding alcoholism treatment centers, and in addition, patients are encouraged to join a self-help group. Inevitably, you will be faced with a situation that traditionally motivated you to turn to alcohol for comfort. Counseling will help you find ways to react differently to these situations.

Some people can quit drinking on their own, but for most people, rehabilitation and family support are key. Therefore, many recovery programs offer marital counseling and family therapy.

If you think that you or a loved one may have a problem with alcohol, consult a physician. For additional information regarding alcoholism and alcohol abuse, please contact the following organizations:

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc  
212-870-3400  
<http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org>

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information  
800-729-6686  
<http://www.health.org/index.htm>

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc.  
HOPE LINE: 800-NCA-CALL (24-hour affiliate referral)  
<http://www.ncadd.org>

Don't wait ... the sooner you seek help, the better your chances for recovery. Alcohol awareness can lead you down a path to better health.

*Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."*